



Children's hygiene and sanitation training in Somalia

Esther de Vreede

How can children best learn about hygiene and the links between poor hygiene and poor health? This article describes how the CHAST (Children's Hygiene and Sanitation Training) materials were designed in Somalia, so that children could learn these lessons in a fun and memorable way.

Children's Hygiene and Sanitation Training (CHAST) is a newly developed approach for promoting personal hygiene among children living in rural areas of Somalia. Based upon the well-established Participatory Hygiene And Sanitation Transformation (PHAST) approach, CHAST uses a variety of exercises and educational games to teach children aged between five and 12 about the links between personal hygiene and health. The approach is based upon the premise that hygiene practices are largely acquired during childhood – and that it is much easier to change children's habits than those of adults.

CHAST grew out of a series of sessions with schoolchildren in the self-declared republic of Somaliland (north-west Somalia) in the latter half of 2002, during which the exercises and lessons of PHAST were reviewed and adapted to suit the needs and natural understanding of young Somali children. CHAST was developed by Caritas Switzerland with funding from the European Union. The resulting

exercises seek to deliver fundamental hygiene lessons and information in a fun and memorable way – and a way that is conducive to the hygiene-related practices of daily Somali life and traditional Islamic culture. By giving children practical lessons and tips on improving their own cleanliness and hygiene, CHAST aims to create an important channel for delivering these messages directly into local homes.

CHAST uses a 'child-to-child' approach to encourage children to participate actively in open discussions and, wherever possible, to share their experiences and ideas with their peers. Three characters – Aisha, Jama and Ali – have been created to encourage the children to speak out on specific (often sensitive) subjects, while a puppet called Luuf is passed around to encourage young or shier children to take part in these discussions. In the CHAST exercises, children are encouraged to work independently, in pairs or in small groups, before presenting their thoughts and findings to the larger group. Above all else, CHAST tools are meant to be fun – involving games, exercises and role-plays that prompt the children to discuss and genuinely understand key issues related to cleanliness and hygiene.

PHAST and CHAST

PHAST is a programme developed jointly by WHO and the UNDP/World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme; it is based on the idea that lasting behavioural changes require a proper understanding of the links between poor hygiene and poor health. The

approach involves specific participatory activities, using visual aids and other tools for community groups to discover for themselves the faecal–oral contamination routes of disease. They can then analyse their own hygiene behaviour in the light of this information and plan how to block these 'disease routes'.

The PHAST approach for Somalia is based upon the *PHAST Step-by-Step Guide*,¹ which utilizes drawings from the CD *PHAST: Drawings for Use in Somalia*.² The original PHAST approach was adapted to the local Somali situation in a joint venture between Caritas Switzerland and Luxembourg, Oxfam GB, SCF UK and COOPI (an Italian NGO). Other international, local and UN organizations participated in training workshops facilitated by Caritas Switzerland, which co-ordinates hygiene and sanitation activities among organizations all over Somalia.

Different PHAST tools were adapted to the specific social and cultural environment in Somalia, including illustrations of typical Somali settings and role-plays linking development with hygiene and sanitation issues. A series of posters was designed with Somali characters devised by local artists. Caritas's experience has shown that, with a few key modifications, the PHAST methodology can easily and effectively be replicated in the Somali context.

Many of the seven steps of PHAST find their counterparts in CHAST, but the CHAST approach omits activities such as mapping, planning and selecting options. Instead there are activities like colouring drawings, playing games



and trying out hygienic activities more suitable to the children (see Figure 1).

Implementation

At present, the CHAST approach is different from the more formal teaching methodology used in the schools of Somalia, so it is appropriate that trained PHAST facilitators introduce the sessions to Somali children. Negotiations are currently ongoing with the Ministry of Education in Hargeisa, Somaliland, and UN agencies for the incorporation of CHAST tools into the formal primary school curriculum in Somaliland.

The manual, *Children's Hygiene and Sanitation Training*,³ is designed to provide CHAST/PHAST facilitators with a detailed methodology, together with step-by-step instructions for facilitating each session and using each exercise and tool. An accompanying CD Rom contains easily replicable illustrations of the CHAST characters and posters, instructions for making the puppet Luuf, and other useful training tips. The 'child-to-child' approach extends the usual definition of the term, ensuring that children's training on hygiene and sanitation will also have an impact on their families and peer groups.

The IRC has also produced the *Joyful Learning* teacher's package (see Book Review section of this edition).⁴ *Joyful Learning* is a dynamic guide for teachers and others who want to design lessons on hygiene and sanitation as part of, or in addition to, their school's curriculum. It uses participatory methods in all activities, and suggests readily available and adjustable no- and low-cost materials,



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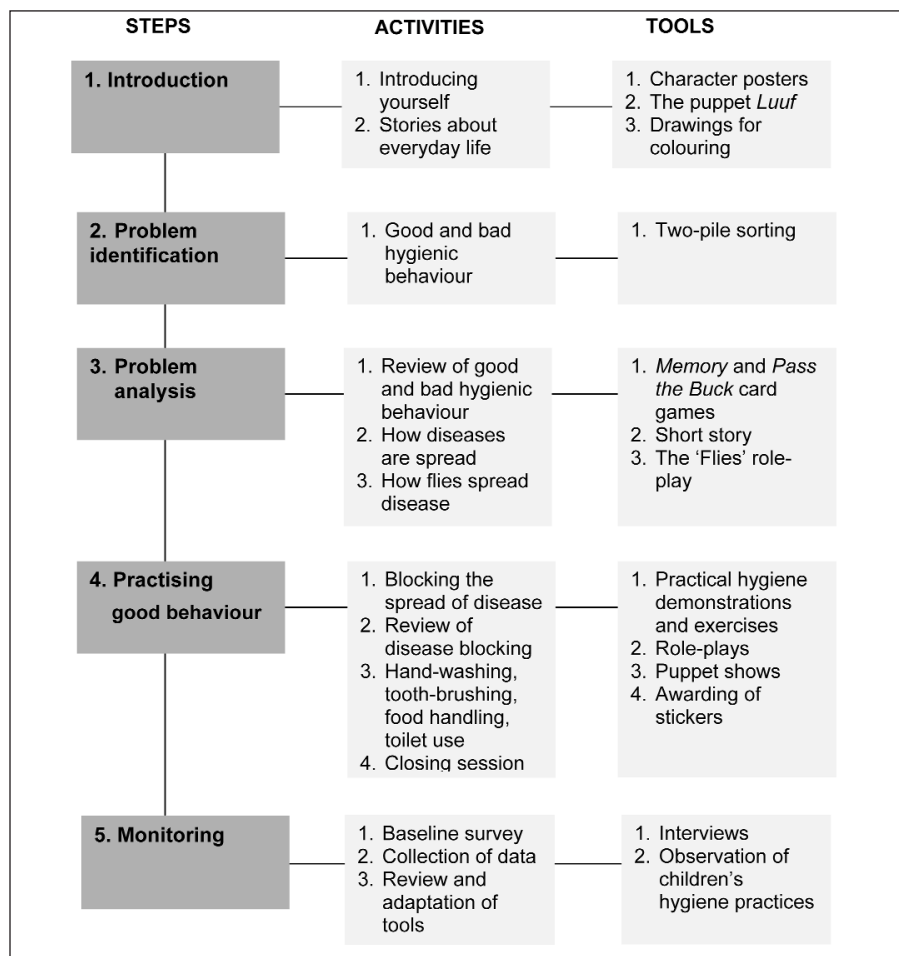


Figure 1. CHAST: Five steps for changing children's hygienic behaviour

and encourages linkages with activities at home.

The steps described in the CHAST guide and the drawings therefore provide a complete package of tools for launching a comprehensive hygiene and sanitation promotion programme for primary school children. Although this guide is comprehensive, it is vital that facilitators seek proper training in using the CHAST methodology before using the tools with children, in order to ensure that they will deliver an effective programme.

Caritas Switzerland is implementing the CHAST and PHAST approaches in parts of rural Somaliland in combination with constructing school buildings and water and sanitation facilities, while other organizations are implementing it in other regions and urban areas. Implementing CHAST with children alongside community facilitators running PHAST with the adults and hardware provision helps to create a bigger impact, leading to lasting behaviour change.

About the author

Esther de Vreede is the Hygiene & Sanitation Co-ordinator for Somaliland with Caritas Switzerland.

References

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- 2 *PHAST: Drawings for use in Somalia* (2004) CD-Rom, Caritas Switzerland, limited availability from swissgroup@caritas-switzerland.org
- 3 *Children's Hygiene and Sanitation Training (CHAST): A Practical Guide* (2004), 1st edition, Caritas Switzerland/Caritas Luxembourg, Hargeisa, limited availability from swissgroup@caritas-switzerland.org.
- 4 Christine van Wijk (2004) *Joyful Learning on Hygiene, Sanitation, Water, Health and the Environment: A source book for lesson plans*, IRC, The Netherlands.